GCSE

History

Report on the Components

June 2007

CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education History A (1935)

**General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)
History A (1035)**

REPORTS ON THE COMPONENTS

REPORT ON THE GCSE HISTORY PILOT (May 2007)

UNIT 1 EXTERNALLY SET TASK (4971)

This is the first report on Unit 1 (the Externally Set Task) of the GCSE History Pilot. This externally set task was undertaken by 2044 candidates in the summer of 2007. One of the aims of the Pilot is to provide candidates with innovative forms of assessment that enable them to demonstrate genuine historical skills and understandings. Here, the externally set task focuses on the selection and critical deployment of sources of evidence and information in order to test a given statement. Whilst the task is conducted under controlled conditions, by encouraging candidates to use all the resources at their disposal and within a four hour period, it was hoped that they would be enabled fully to demonstrate a range of competencies not normally anticipated in more conventional externally set history examinations.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates had a choice of one from two options:

- Raiders and Invaders: the British Isles c.400–c.1100
- Power and Control: Kingship in the Middle Ages c.1100–c.1500

The majority of centres taught, and therefore their candidates responded to, the first option.

The full range of responses expected at GCSE level was seen by examiners. There was much praise for really excellent, thoughtful, reflective work produced by high-achieving candidates who provided clear evidence of the ability to produce well reasoned and well supported analyses, explanations, arguments and genuine historical conclusions. All candidates managed to find something of value to say about their chosen option.

(a) Preparing for the externally set task

This externally set task provides a completely new way of assessing GCSE History and teachers had clearly prepared candidates for this. This was evident in the confident way many candidates accessed and discussed various resources, including web-sites, that were of direct relevance to the statement they were testing. Clearly, some centres had familiarised their students with the range of resources available and the sort of information and evidence that could be obtained from them, and these students generally did well. Candidates who had not had this familiarisation experience as part of the teaching and learning process for this unit clearly had problems in that they spent a great deal of time consulting reference books and endlessly trawling the Internet. Almost invariably they ended up down-loading sections of Wikipedia.

An enormously wide range and variety of source material is available, in both printed and electronic form, for both options. Clearly, some centres had tried to help their students manage this information by preparing source booklets for them. Whilst this might be a useful teaching tool, and a way in to the richness of available source material that some students might otherwise have found overwhelming, there can be problems when it comes to external assessment. Candidates relying solely on such a booklet of sources, pre-selected by their teacher, were in some cases inhibited in their responses where the provided sources did not provide sufficient evidence to enable them to test the given statement. "My source booklet", wrote one candidate, "didn't have anything on the Normans settling in England." Had this candidate been encouraged to explore a range of source material focusing on the organising questions, he would not have had this problem.

It was clear to examiners that some centres had provided their candidates with writing frames that they considered appropriate for the externally set task. Whilst the provision of such scaffolding may be appropriate in a teaching and learning context, it is not necessarily appropriate in an assessment context where such frames can inhibit the more able from fully exploring a particular issue perhaps in an unusual way.

(b) The Externally Set Task: Researching

The question paper provided a series of hints about 'How to tackle the task'. It suggested that candidates start with the sources with which they are familiar. Here, it was clear that those candidates who had been working during lesson time with a wide range of sources focused on the organising questions were at an advantage. They selected sources with confidence and only accessed other resources with which they were not familiar when they felt the sources with which they were familiar did not fully test the given statement.

Some candidates had problems in selecting sources that were appropriate. They relied on sources that 'told the story' rather than those that could be used directly to support or challenge the given statement.

Far too many candidates relied on Wikipedia for basic information. It would be sensible to warn them that this site is not a foolproof encyclopaedia that can be relied upon to provide dispassionate information. Indeed, no candidate chose to evaluate this source.

Some candidates mismanaged their time, clearly spending too long researching to be able effectively to deploy the products of their research in an effective answer. It is completely in order for the supervising teacher to suggest to candidates, after a couple of hours, that it is time to stop researching and to begin to plan and write an answer to the question set.

(c) The Externally Set Task: Writing Up

Many candidates appreciated the need to establish criteria against which they were to test the given statement. These were frequently listed at the beginning of the response; sometimes they headed up separate paragraphs. However, despite establishing criteria, a disappointing number of candidates then ignored their own criteria entirely, contenting themselves with a descriptive, narrative answer.

The main problem perceived by examiners concerned selection and deployment. Candidates who had selected sources that were suitable for testing the given statement then seemed unable to deploy them appropriately. Generally, instead of using them to challenge or support the given statement, they simply incorporated them as part of the narrative.

Approaches to setting down their findings and testing the given statement varied between centres and between candidates within centres. At one extreme were the candidates who listed a number of sources and drew inferences from them in a more or less connected narrative; at the other end of the spectrum were the candidates who never mentioned a source at all but wrote a coherent and sometimes well argued account. The ideal response would be a combination of the two, with an analysis and evaluation of a small number of carefully selected sources creating a coherent and well argued response, fully testing the given statement. Better candidates managed this and reading work of this calibre was a real pleasure.

Source evaluation was, in general, disappointing. Most candidates tended to adopt a simplistic approach: it was written by a monk and therefore biased, or drawn by a Frenchman and so unreliable. Part of the reason for this may well have been the number of sources with which some candidates were trying to deal. A small number of sources, appropriately selected and evaluated, would test the given statement more effectively than a large number of sources used to create a narrative account. Few candidates were able to comment effectively on interpretations.

Timing problems prevented a small but significant number of candidates from drawing an effective, supported conclusion.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

(i)   Raiders and Invaders: The British Isles c.400–c.1100

A disappointingly large number of candidates interpreted the phrase 'successful settlers' as 'successful invaders'. Many candidates had considerable difficulty in distinguishing between the concepts of raiding and invading and that of settling. Often quite sophisticated arguments were made about the process of invasion, with the implication being that if the invasion was successful, then the settlement had to be, too.

Responses from candidates did not follow a set pattern. Some set criteria and applied them to each of the groups; some started with the Saxons and measured other groups against them; others introduced criteria as they worked through their response.

The majority of candidates treated each of the three groups of invaders separately. However, the best responses tended to be those that organised their response thematically, criterion by criterion, and brought in examples from Saxons, Vikings and Normans as they tested the given statement.

A small but significant number of candidates had little to say about the Normans and some wrote nothing at all about this group of settlers. This relates to timing problems outlined in the general comments, but could also be a teaching issue. Centres are reminded of the need to complete the entire teaching programme, as the question set will always require a comparison to be made.

(ii)   Power and Control: Kingship in the Middle Ages c.1100–c.1500

Most candidates equated 'successful' with 'good' when it came to discussing the qualities a monarch needed.

Responses from the majority of candidates tended to follow a set pattern, taking each ruler in turn, identifying and discussing the various qualities they displayed. Where criteria were not identified in advance, this approach tended to lead to potted biographies being presented as the findings of research. In some cases these biographies could be traced directly to specific web-sites. Candidates must be reminded that if they are down-loading material like this, they must identify it as a source and subject it to evaluation, just as they would any other source. Wikipedia featured many times, and a warning about this site has already been given.

A small number of responses adopted a thematic approach, taking each criterion in turn and applying it to the various rulers. Where the criteria were appropriate, this tended to be a very successful approach.

A relatively large number of candidates chose to embellish their responses with portraits of the various rulers. This served no useful purpose. If illustrations are to be used, they must be evaluated as any other source material or used to illustrate a specific point.

CONCLUSION

It is very easy, in providing feed-back on an examination that is the first of its kind in GCSE History, to highlight problems and pitfalls. It must be emphasised here that examiners found much to praise. It was heartening to see students using source material to test a hypothesis and linking this to their own knowledge of the topic. Many students, operating at different levels, wrote with genuine understanding about Normans, Saxons and Vikings, John, Edward I, Owain Glyn Dwr and Henry V, showing that they appreciated they were dealing with real people, facing real problems and within different historical contexts that influenced their behaviour. As one examiner put it, "It was good to see candidates doing real history." There is much to learn from this pilot for us all, but now, at the end of the first externally assessed task, both teachers and students are to be congratulated on their commitment to the pilot and on the outcome of the assessment of this unit, which has much to offer in the development of GCSE examinations.

**REPORT ON GCSE HISTORY PILOT
SPRING 2007**

COURSEWORK UNITS 4972 AND 4973

General comments

This is the first report on the GCSE History Pilot and focuses on the Local History and International History coursework units which candidates completed in January 2007. One of the aims of the Pilot was to provide candidates with opportunities to produce exciting, varied and innovative work. It is pleasing to report that this aim has been largely achieved with moderators seeing work in the form of posters, displays, exhibitions, town trails, guide-books, newspaper articles and websites as well as more traditional essays. Some of this work consisted of Powerpoint and moviemaker presentations on CDs and DVDs.

These different approaches, along with the exciting nature of some of the topics chosen, clearly motivated many candidates and led to a wide range of skills being displayed. However, they also raised issues about the pitfalls, as well as the possibilities, of using such approaches for assessment. These will be discussed later in this report.

A real strength of the candidates' work was the opportunities created for candidates to engage in debate in topical and sometimes sensitive issues such as terrorism, protest and the Holocaust. It was encouraging to see candidates dealing with these issues sensitively and developing and supporting their own points of view.

As with any new specification, especially one such as the Pilot with unusual assessment arrangements, there were a few administrative problems when it came to sending marks and samples of work to the moderators. The odd centre was defeated by the rather complicated entry arrangements, ending up with candidates being entered either late or for the wrong unit. Occasionally, Centre Authentication forms and cover sheets were missing and a few centres sent mark sheets with no candidate numbers or teaching sets identified.

However, virtually all centres provided detailed and helpful annotation on the students' work indicating where, and how well, different assessment objectives had been covered. This made the task of moderating much easier especially as the moderators were able to confirm the marks awarded by the majority of centres. Moderators were also pleased to note that while a few centres allowed their candidates to significantly exceed the recommended number of words, the majority ensured that their candidates kept close to 2000 words. In most cases this helped candidates to keep to the question and avoid writing pages of description and narrative.

The marking of the work

About half of the centres had their marks adjusted, although in nearly all cases the adjustments were minor ones with as many centres having their marks adjusted upwards as centres whose marks were brought down a little. The small number of major disagreements between teachers and moderators appears to indicate that the training meetings on marking had been effective in establishing a common standard. The two main points that came out of that meeting – to mark holistically and to use a 'best fit' approach to the band descriptors in the mark scheme – appear to have been acted upon by nearly all centres.

Some centres structured their assignments into a number of questions. In these cases it is important that the work of a candidate is assessed as a whole instead of each answer being marked separately. Each of the band descriptors contains elements of all the assessment objectives. Markers should not wait before awarding a particular mark until every requirement of that band is met. The approach and nature of each assignment led candidates to focus their work more on some assessment objectives than others. As long as there is some evidence of some parts of all the assessment objectives, this does not matter. It is more important that candidates provide a good answer to the question than try and cover every part of every assessment objective in an artificial way. This leads naturally to a best fit approach to the mark scheme where the marker simply asks, for example: does this candidate's answer fit Band 4 better than it fits Band 3?

The many strengths of the work

About three times as many centres completed the International Unit as attempted the Local History Unit, although there was no evidence that one unit was more successful, or caused more difficulties, than the other. There was much splendid work for both units and some of the strengths that emerged are discussed below.

The units worked best when open-ended but clearly focussed assignments were combined with an holistic approach to assessment, ensuring that candidates did not feel as if they were made to 'jump through hoops'. The positive results of this were most evident in the work of the best candidates who had the freedom to 'fly free' and produced original, sophisticated, well supported and stimulating work.

A fascinating aspect of some of the work was that the nature of some of the topics, some of the assignments and the need to cover a range of assessment criteria naturally in response to a big question led candidates to deal with areas such as source evaluation and interpretations in ways significantly differently from the way they are covered in conventional GCSEs. For example, instead of separate questions on different aspects of source evaluation, many candidates attempted to integrate such skills naturally into their main argument in response to the big question. This produced better History. In the work on the Crusades, for example, candidates produced some very interesting analyses of the different ways in which the word 'crusade' has been used with different meanings and for different purposes over the centuries. When done well and in context, this led to the moderators recognising a fresh and extremely valid and useful approach to interpretations.

Many candidates of all abilities relished the opportunity to investigate issues which they felt were important and relevant with the result that much of the work displayed considerable personal engagement with the topics being studied. The best work showed a maturity of judgement, an ability to marshal facts, evaluate arguments and develop their own views far beyond what is usually seen in conventional GCSE work. The wider range of types of presentation was also a positive element for many candidates. Even when work was written it was often presented in different formats, for example, letters, posters, exhibitions and surveys which many found more purposeful than essays.

The key issue in both units is 'significance'. When this was addressed directly some excellent work was produced with candidates, for example, understanding links between events such as the Holocaust and the world they live in today and making comparisons between events in the past such as the Vietnam War and more recent events such as the invasion of Iraq. In the Local History unit the best work considered how aspects of local history are still important and relevant to the local community today. Surveys investigated the views of local people and there were some excellent arguments for rescuing forgotten local figures and sites and for more effective promotion of certain aspects of the history of the locality. An important strength was the focus given to the part the locality played in broader national developments. It was clear that both

units enabled candidates to focus on content not usually covered at this level including very recent history and specific local history.

Many of the assignments allowed candidates to show skills in making links across time and place such as the medieval Crusades and modern events in the Middle East or terrorism in World War I, Ireland and the Middle East or protest covering the suffragettes, Vietnam and recent examples.

In some centres candidates carried out research of a type not often seen in conventional GCSE work. Surveys were conducted with members of the public being interviewed (and in some cases contacting the school to say how impressed they had been with the students and how interesting they found the work that they were doing), and even electronic communication methods being used to survey the opinions of people in different countries. Local history attracted some interesting research on the attitudes of local people to changes in their community and their views on how a site or event should be preserved or commemorated. Other centres involved local ex-miners to help investigations into local industry while others staged exhibitions of the candidates' work for parents and others to see.

A particular strength of much of the work was the ability to select and write for particular audiences, for example, a persuasive letter to George Bush on the misuse of the term 'Crusade'. There was also encouraging evidence of key skills such as literacy and citizenship.

Assignments that worked well

Local history assignments that worked included asking candidates which of two local worthies should be commemorated by the town. The work towards the final assignment involved preparing a town trail, so candidates had to seek out and comment on visual evidence for the careers of the two men. Another centre set a pair of questions that asked candidates to consider the impact of the First World War on the local community, at the time and today. This could have fizzled out into vague assertions, but the candidates had an interesting set of sources to use which could be added to from their own researches. A more contemporary study examined the impact of the end of coal mining in the locality on the local community. Again good structuring and guidance kept the enquiry rooted in real events, people and buildings. With less support this assignment could have degenerated into a history of the coal industry.

Many centres attempted to address the significance of the Vietnam War or the Holocaust in their International unit. These assignments worked best when the temptation to set introductory questions on, for example, the causes of the Vietnam War or the rise of the Nazis was avoided. Such questions diverted candidates away from the main issue. Candidates produced better work when the task (whether it was presented as one main question or structured into several sub-questions) was clearly focused on the issue of significance in its broadest sense. Those candidates who had clearly investigated different criteria for investigating significance during earlier lessons found it easier to keep to the point and to plan their answers. Dealing with the present-day significance of a past event requires a wide knowledge of world events and an ability to see and explore links. Many candidates were stimulated by these demands to produce some excellent work.

Narrowly defined and well-focused topics worked best, for example, What was the significance of the Crusades, at the time, and today? How far has the Olympic Games in the twentieth century been more than just a sporting event? The latter worked exceptionally well when candidates arranged their answers around particular case studies, for example, the 1936 Olympics, the Munich Olympics in 1972 and the Moscow Olympics of 1980, and when they had a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the broader political context for each event.

The main issues that arose from the work

Both units require significance to be a major issue for consideration. The Local History unit requires candidates to consider the relevance and significance of a historical site, person or event to the local community today, while the International unit asks for the international significance of an event, issue or development to be investigated. In some of the work candidates failed to address issues of significance head on. The weakest work often contained masses of material on the background with significance being considered in the final couple of paragraphs. Some candidates spent far too long explaining the causes of the event or describing the event itself. Some started by identifying criteria for measuring significance and then failed to use them in the main part of their answers.

The issue of structuring is relevant here. Should assignments be set as one question or as a series of smaller questions? This issue is a difficult one and the solution depends to a large extent on the ability of the candidates. Heavy structuring can make it more difficult for candidates to develop and support their arguments. It can also limit the scope for very able candidates to show independence and initiative. However, no structure or guidance can leave average and weak candidates floundering.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches. Both can be done well, and both can be handled so badly as to seriously disadvantage the candidates. Poor structuring consisted of providing the candidates with far too many questions, none of which allowed candidates to develop their analysis and argument at any length or depth. Some centres appeared to have used structured questions to provide a mechanical coverage of various aspects of the assessment objectives. This led to separate questions being set on, for example, narrative, causation and source evaluation and had the effect of distracting candidates from the main investigation and the big question about significance. Structured questions worked best when the separate questions were clearly linked, all fed into the big issue about significance, and led candidates to a final question which addressed the issue head on. Single questions worked well when they were supported by additional guidance which unpacked the task for the candidates, made clear what the main focus was and suggested in outline possible strategies.

In the Local History unit the work on the significance of the issue/person in the past was generally done more effectively than the consideration of its significance to the local community today. Centres need to evaluate their assignments (and even their schemes of work) to address this next time round. In the International unit some candidates paid too little attention to 'international' and tended not to consider long term significance. For example in work on the Vietnam War there was sometimes much material on the impact of the war on the people of Vietnam at the time or on politics in the USA at the time, but little on its impact on the USA's view about its role in the world in the decades since or on international reactions to US power and influence.

While some candidates spent far too long on describing the historical background, others knew too little history. Some, for example, could make many good general points about the Olympics being more than a sporting event but when they came to actual examples such as the 1972 Olympics they knew little about the events or the international and political context at the time. Some candidates would have benefited from more study in depth of the history in class. When broad themes were followed over a 100 years or more some candidates resorted to writing a narrative or to writing in generalities. The clear lesson from the assignments that worked well is that such themes should be investigated through a series of in-depth case studies across the period.

The precise wording of the assignment question(s) is crucial. Some centres were rather slack with this with different candidates writing on their work different versions of the question. Some had even managed to write down a title that was not a question. Careful thought has to go into

the question to get it just right and to direct the candidates in the right directions - all this effort is to no avail if candidates are then allowed to adapt the question any way they like.

The presentation and format of the work

As has already been mentioned there was a good range of different methods of presenting the work including Powerpoint presentations and the use of Moviemaker and DVD. There were some examples of these approaches working outstandingly well such as a DVD tour of Tiverton producing remarkable and detailed personal investigations. There was also evidence that some candidates need more guidance in using these different media to answer the question set and to demonstrate their understanding and skills There were occasions where the medium had taken over and the candidate had clearly spent more time worrying about issues of presentation than about the content. There are instances, and this is one of them, when the medium by itself is not the entire message. Candidates who based their presentations on a series of images often used too many and wrote too little about each one. This approach also sometimes led to a disjointed response with too much focus on the details in each image and the overall question being addressed only obliquely or in a short conclusion at the end. Moderators do not want to discourage the use of Powerpoint and Moviemaker but it is clear that candidates need more guidance in using them in ways that aid them in answering the question, rather than hindering. Some centres got round this problem by allowing the candidates to produce and deliver their presentations but then requiring them to use these as a stimulus for writing a more traditional piece of work for assessment purposes. At the end of the day the work will be assessed in relation to the question set and to the assessment criteria whatever the format used.

A few hints about constructing schemes of work and assignments

(i)   schemes of work

•   make the scheme of work relevant directly relevant to the big issue and to the assignment. It should cover the history and introduce the issues that candidates will need to work with in the assignment.

•   it should allow time to be devoted to investigating what is meant by significance and the different criteria that are used to judge it.

•   it should contain opportunities for the candidates to learn some history in depth. This does not have to mean a return to didactic teaching as it could be based on the candidates researching individually or in groups. The important point is that they develop some knowledge and understanding in depth which they can use in their answer.

•   thematic topics that cover a long period of time are best covered through case studies.

•   it should provide at least one opportunity for a 'dry run'. The candidates should have the opportunity to at least plan their answer to an exercise similar in type to real one they will have to complete.

•   introduce a wide variety of learning approaches e.g. individual work, group work, presentations, debates, visiting speakers, visits outside school, use of books, the internet, TV programmes and computer programmes.

(ii)   assignments

- always set a question or questions; never use a descriptive title that does not set a problem for the candidates to address

- abandon any idea of using or adapting your current GCSE coursework

- put time into thinking about the key requirement of the unit and devise a question that addresses it

- put time into thinking about the balance of the breadth and depth of knowledge that a satisfactory answer would require. Do not be too ambitious - some assignments ended up as very broad and demanding topics. If the topic is very broad, provide some focus through case studies (candidates could choose two or three from a list)

- provide additional general guidance as to how to begin to tackle the question(s). Provide some general structure that breaks down the big question e.g. a set of criteria for making a judgement or suggestions about viewing the question from different perspectives (an important element of significance). Never use more than three questions.

- if more than one question is used, make sure they are connected and all address the big issue in some way. The final question should still require that the main issue of significance be met head on. Do not set a series of small questions each covering a single aspect of the assessment criteria

- encourage candidates to: analyse rather then describe; argue rather than narrate; look at and evaluate different points of view; support their arguments and judgements; have the confidence to take risks and come up with their own judgements rather than second-hand ones; make sure the conclusion reflects the direction of the argument in the body of the work rather than just being bolted-on as an afterthought.

Finally, it is important to underline that fact that the moderators have no doubt that these first unit completed in the Pilot have been a success. The work has been a pleasure to moderate and it has been inspiring to read so much interesting, challenging and varied work by well-motivated candidates. It has been possible to detect how much hard work the candidates have put into their answers and how much enjoyment they have got out of the course. The last word should be about the teachers who have taken a step into the unknown by signing up to the Pilot. An enormous amount of expertise and hard work has gone into constructing the courses and into devising the assignments. There are already clear signs that the Pilot has much to offer the future development of GCSE in general. The hard work has been worth it.

General Certificate of Secondary Education
History Pilot (Specification Code 1038)
June 2007 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a*	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	u
4971	Raw	50	40	34	28	23	19	15	12	9	0
	UMS	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15	10	0
4972	Raw	50	45	40	35	30	24	19	14	9	0
	UMS	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15	10	0
4973	Raw	50	45	40	35	30	24	19	14	9	0
	UMS	50	45	40	35	30	25	20	15	10	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1038	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
4971	5.7	16.0	35.1	54.3	69.4	81.4	89.2	94.0	100.0	1964
4972	7.7	20.1	36.6	55.2	76.1	85.4	92.9	98.0	100.0	547
4973	8.3	21.5	39.9	63.3	78.1	88.4	95.0	97.5	100.0	1470
1038	5.2	17.1	33.2	55.0	70.5	84.7	93.3	97.6	100.0	786

786 candidates were entered for aggregation this series.

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see;
http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.